

A Note for Visitors

We ask that you follow the example of parishioners as to standing and sitting during the services, men on the right and women on the left □ all dressed modestly and appropriately. The tradition of the church is that of standing during the services. The aged and those who are ill are exempted from standing.

Antidoron, blessed bread, is distributed at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy to those Orthodox Christians who have fasted and did not receive Holy Communion. You may come forward to venerate the cross held by the clergyman and introduce yourself to him.

Thank you for visiting our Church. We hope you will read this pamphlet and contact us with any questions you might have.

For further information about HOCNA, our parish and bookstore, you may contact:

THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

Heaven on Earth

“We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth . . . We only know that God dwells there among men, and their service is fairer than the ceremonies of other nations.”

With these words, envoys of pagan Russian Prince Vladimir in the year 987, sent to search for the true religion, recorded their impression of Divine Services in the Cathedral of Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) in Constantinople. Within a year of their report, Prince Vladimir and the people of the Rus were baptized into Christ by Orthodox missionaries.

Today, as in St. Vladimir’s time, the Orthodox Church – fully aware that man is a union of body and soul – uses all the beauty of creation to move her faithful children to prayer and worship: holy icons, beautiful chanting, fragrant incense, and majestic services.

Yet if the visible beauty of the Church is dazzling, her unseen beauty and glory are even more compelling, for the Orthodox Church is the Bride of Christ, and within her shelter we can begin to struggle for our salvation.

Orthodoxy is a Greek word meaning both “right worship” and “right belief.”

Orthodox Tradition

The Sacred Tradition of the Orthodox Church flows in a living and unbroken stream from the time of the Apostles down to Orthodox believers today. Sacred Tradition, from which flowed Holy Scripture, includes the unwritten acts and teachings of Christ and the Apostles and is preserved unchanged

by the Church (John 21:25; 2.Thess. 2:15; 2.Thess.3:6)

The power of Sacred Tradition is the power of the Holy Spirit as it influences Orthodox Christians in all ages. Through Sacred Tradition we are in communion with the spiritual life of all preceding generations back to the Apostles.

Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture, and the decrees of the seven Ecumenical Councils and other councils of the Church form the corpus of our Holy Faith.

Orthodox Belief

We worship God in Trinity, glorifying equally the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is truly God, the Son of God the Father, begotten before all ages, of one essence with the Father, and that Christ incarnate is truly man, like us in all respects except sin. We worship the Holy Spirit as Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father.

We honor and venerate Mary, the Theotokos (Birth-giver of God), the saints and angels, and ask for their intercession before God in our behalf.

Baptism and Chrismation are the two mysteries (sacraments) essential to enter into the saving shelter of the Church. Baptism by triple immersion washes away our sins and restores the image of God, lost by Adam. With Chrismation we receive the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, becoming partakers of the fullness of Christ.

In the mystery of the Holy Eucharist we partake of the true Body and Blood of Christ, in the form of bread and wine, for the remission of sins, for the healing of body and soul, and for life eternal.

The mystery of Confession is essential for the life of all Christians. In confession, Christ gives us, through our father confessor, the forgiveness of the sins we commit after Baptism, if we truly repent of them.

Ordination, Matrimony, and Holy Unction complete the seven basic mysteries of Orthodoxy. By the laying-on of hands, a bishop transmits Divine Grace to the person being ordained, linking him, through the continuing flow of Grace that descended on

the Apostles at Pentecost, to the uninterrupted succession of Orthodox clergy. Divine Grace sanctifies the union of a man and a woman in Matrimony, for the salvation of their souls and for the procreation of children. The mystery of Holy Unction heals infirmities of body and soul.

Sacred Space

Virtually everything you see in an Orthodox Church symbolizes and calls to mind some aspect of our meeting with eternal Divinity.

Icons (holy images) – venerated but not adored – depict not the natural beauty of the material world but the spiritual beauty of the Kingdom of Heaven, drawing the worshipper into the spiritual life of the Church like silent, ever-teaching sermons. Icons have a deep significance in Orthodox life. Because the Son of God took on human flesh and became incarnate as the God-man Jesus Christ, it became possible to portray the glory of God incarnate. *“Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see!” (Luke 10:23)*. Free from the subjective, sentimental, and fleshy quality of naturalistic religious art, the true icon, painted (or “written”) through the power of the Holy Spirit, is in communion with the spiritual life of the Church from its earliest days in the Catacombs of Rome. As you gaze into an icon, the calm eye of eternal Truth falls upon you, and you begin to perceive the true beauty and order of all things visible and invisible.

Lighted candles burn before the icons and on the altar to signify the light of Truth given by Our Lord and Savior, thereby illuminating the world with spiritual radiance. (Leviticus 24: 1-7) Candles also symbolize the soul’s burning love for God and the spiritual joy and triumph of the Church.

Raised above the main body of the Church, the sanctuary is where the clergy perform the divine services. The icon screen is placed in front of the altar, dividing the sanctuary from the body of the Church – not to hide it but to emphasize the inner mystery of the sacraments.

An Orthodox Church is open – there are no pews. We stand during worship services out of reverence and humility before God. The absence of pews gives us freedom to move about the Church and feel at home. We are free to venerate icons and light candles, as well as to bow and make the prostrations called for at times during worship.

Musical instruments are not used in an Orthodox Church. In our Church(es???) the chants are sung by the worshippers or by chanters alternating between the right and left choirs.

Orthodox Worship

In Orthodox worship, correct praise of God and correct teaching about God are closely interwoven. If you follow attentively the prayers and services of the Church, you can learn from them all her teachings and rich spiritual experience.

The services trace their beginnings back to the Old Testament rites of the Hebrews. They are a treasury of Scripture readings, prayers, hymns, and canons composed by Saints and pious Christians throughout the ages.

Every Sunday is a celebration of the Resurrection of Our Lord and Savior, and feasts of the events of the life of Christ and His all-holy Mother are spaced throughout the year to remind us of His savings acts and to deepen our understanding. Also celebrated are feast days of Saints, the Archangels, and commemorations of special events in the history of the Church. Through these annual celebrations, we live again the mystery of our salvation. Also, by adhering to the Julian calendar, we are united to all worshippers of the past two thousand years.

Pascha (or Passover, called Easter in the West) is the Feast of Feasts, the highpoint of the Orthodox year. During Pascha the Church shines with the glory of Christ’s Resurrection. Clouds of fragrant incense waft heavenward, accompanying the prayers of the faithful on earth (Psalm 140: 2); choirs and bells sing out the triumphant news; we greet one another with the holy kiss of peace and proclaim that “Christ is risen!” The altar doors are left open all of Bright Week (the week following Pascha) to show that the

Gates of Paradise have been opened by Christ for us sinners, for our eternal life and joy in Heaven.

Fasting

Fasting is an integral part of Orthodox worship, which is not complete without it. A strict fast consists of eating less and abstaining from all animal products (meat, fish, dairy), alcoholic beverages, and olive oil; on days of less strict fasting, we are permitted wine and olive oil. There are no dietary restrictions on fast-free days. We fast on Wednesdays in commemoration of the betrayal of Christ and on Fridays in honor of the Crucifixion. We also fast during longer periods prior to the feastday of the Apostles Peter and Paul, the Dormition of the Theotokos, and Nativity (known in the West as Christmas). Great Lent is observed prior to Pascha. The purpose of fasting, which should be accompanied by more time for prayer and Church services and less time spent on secular pursuits and entertainment, is to help us cleave more strongly to God and to loosen the material desires that keep us bound to earth. Fasting is a cleansing of the mind and body and an uplifting of the soul to God.

The Church of Christ

The Orthodox Church is the True Apostolic Church of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who founded His Church through His Apostles. By the grace of the Holy Spirit received at Pentecost, the Apostles established the Church throughout the ancient world. For a millennium, Orthodox Christendom was undivided, under the leadership of the Bishops of the five Apostolic Patriarchates: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem.

Over time, however, the Patriarchate of Rome introduced various heresies, such as changing the Nicene Creed, claiming supremacy of the Pope of Rome over the other Bishops, promoting the false doctrine of purgatory. These and other innovations, unhistorical and unsupported by either Holy Scripture or Holy Tradition, resulted in the separation of Rome from the historical and

true Church of Christ, the common date of this separation being 1054.

Drifting further from its origins, continuing to introduce innovations, the Western church in the 16th century was shattered into a myriad of sects by the Protestant Reformation. Also in that century, Rome introduced the Gregorian calendar, in direct contradiction to the tradition of the Church, which followed the Julian calendar.

In Greece, Russia, the Balkans, the Middle East, and elsewhere, however, the True Apostolic Church of Christ continued to flourish, preserving the Faith of Christ pure and unchanged.

World Orthodoxy Today

Tragically, the Orthodox world was rent asunder in the 1920s by the innovations of the Patriarch of Constantinople, who, without consulting the other Patriarchs and Bishops, introduced the Gregorian calendar, replacing the Julian calendar. Since that time, as one after another of the historic Patriarchates adopted the Gregorian calendar, the pan-heresy of ecumenism has spread throughout the Church, aided by the superficial unity created by the use of the Gregorian calendar.

Ecumenism – in which all churches and organizations calling themselves Christian are said to be equal, each having some “part” of the truth (Truth, like the Church, is indivisible and cannot exist in “parts”) – has been spread by the World Council of Churches and is now following its logical course of expanding to include all non-Christian religions as well. We live in an age in which the path Our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ showed us is said to be just one path to “God” among many paths, i.e., Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, Native American shamanism. This inclusiveness is called syncretism. Truth has been not only divided into parts but is now relative and adaptive. Ecumenists have forgotten that to follow Christ is to hearken unto His words, “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I unto the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every

one that is of the truth heareth my voice” (John 18:37).

Another result of the “new” Orthodoxy is that some worship services have been shortened and others eliminated, pews and organs have been introduced, fasting is neglected, and many of the canons of the Church, decided upon by Ecumenical Councils many centuries ago, have been abandoned – all in the name of progress, relevance to secular lifestyles, and the goal of a superficial union with other churches and organizations.

The Holy Orthodox Church in North America

The Holy Orthodox Church in North America (HOCNA) is an Eparchial Synod with parishes and monastic communities in Canada and the United States. Our people have come not only from Greek, Russian and other jurisdictions but also include many converts from Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. We follow the Julian calendar, do not participate in ecumenical/syncretistic worship, and do not share the Holy Mysteries with other jurisdictions that do participate.

